

MEMORANDUM RE THE WAR IN VIETNAM

I am concerned that the Vietnam War is becoming "President Nixon's War". This is unfair. In a way, it is unavoidable for any man in high government office invariably finds himself responsible for all that has gone before - even for actions initiated by predecessors and frequently beyond his control.

However, there are other factors building up the false impression that the Vietnam War is "President Nixon's War". The Democratic leadership are determined to develop this image. The liberal press - critical of President Nixon's policies in Vietnam and elsewhere - are willingly assisting in every way possible.

On the other hand, Republican spokesmen are not keeping the background of the Vietnam War in focus. Even Governor Reagan inadvertently remarked recently that the Vietnam War was the result of policies of prior administrations including President Eisenhower's. Reagan failed to note that President Eisenhower adamantly refused to exceed the restrictions of the 1954 Geneva Accord with respect to the number of military advisors stationed in South Vietnam.

What is never said today and has long since been forgotten by the public is the fact that when President Eisenhower and Vice President Nixon left office January 20, 1961, the United States had less than 800 military personnel as advisors in South Vietnam, some 800 in the foreign aid staff and, at that time, there had been no casualties. Eight years later, January 20, 1969, when Mr. Nixon took office as President, there were 550,000 military engaged in the war in Vietnam, there were untold thousands

of civilians doing all sorts of things and 35,000 were dead and over 150,000 injured.

The public must be kept informed of these facts. President Nixon's problem is to extract this country from the position created by his two Democratic predecessors. He can be criticized if his policies to accomplish this extraction are not proper, but he cannot be criticized for creating the conditions he found when he assumed office.

Unfortunately, the attack on his November 3rd speech by the liberal press - an unfair attack, in my opinion - coupled with the November 15th demonstrations, appear to have built up the concept in the minds of the public that somehow and for some reason, the Vietnam War is President Nixon's responsibility.

This charge must be answered. Otherwise, President Nixon will soon find himself in the same position as President Johnson. He will be unable to appear in public because of dangers from demonstrators and radicals and the political consequences to him and the Republican Party will be horrendous.

The attack centers on the past but it also centers on President Nixon's present policy.

This policy is two-fold - negotiate a peace - and, if this is not possible, turn the war over to the South Vietnamese under a plan^f and a time schedule that will permit the South to hold out against the North and the Viet Cong. In other words - "Vietnamization" of the war.

Vietnamization of the war - turning over the war to the South Vietnamese - having the ARVN carry the battle - has been a policy for many, many years. It has never worked. Once the United States showed up in force, the South Vietnamese failed to shoulder their share of the burden and as our forces increased, the South Vietnamese's willingness to fight decreased. They saw no necessity to do so. The South Vietnamese's unwillingness defeated our Vietnamization efforts in the past but also these efforts were defeated by our own military who were determined to move in, clean up the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese who ventured South, turn the country back to the South Vietnamese and move out.

Therefore, our military leadership refused to implement Vietnamization policies even when instructed to do so by highest authority. This is the history of Vietnamization efforts through the Kennedy and the Johnson Administrations and, until recently, the Nixon Administration.

Two rather important events changed this. The attitude of the American public in their resentment of the war is growing and will continue to grow. Therefore, Vietnamization is a reasonable solution to that substantial body of domestic and world public opinion critical of our present conduct.

Secondly, the trend of the war in 1968 encourages Vietnamization. The clashes of 1968, including the Tet Offensive, are often spoken of as defeats to our side. History will prove that 1968 was a disastrous year for the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong. Therefore, it is quite probable that the losses suffered by the other side in 1968 will make the Vietnamization policy of the Nixon Administration feasible, wherein it was not feasible in the past. It appears to me that this is a hope upon which the whole

policy of President Nixon hinges.

The question is a matter of time and time is running in two directions - one favoring us and the other favoring Hanoi.

With respect to our side, it is planned and hoped that, as time passes, the South Vietnamese will become more proficient. They will be better equipped, better trained and thus, they will be better able to defeat the opposition. Given enough time, they might possibly develop a military capability sufficient to defend their borders from Northern intruders coming over the Demilitarized Zone or through Laos or Cambodia. And, if their borders are secure, then the internal Viet Cong movement would either disintegrate or could be destroyed. South Vietnam would thus become viable as a result of its political structure and its own military capability.

Hanoi, on the other hand, feels that time is running in their favor. They appear to think that United States - and, for that matter, world - opinion opposes American participation in the Vietnam War as it is today or on any scale at all. The pressure of domestic and world public opinion will eventually force sharp revisions in United States policy which will be favorable to their side. Understandably, they wish to keep their losses at a minimum but they and the Viet Cong will continue guerilla operations, raids, mortar attacks, sabotage and occasionally, large scale (regimental size) operations, all designed to inflict loss on us, to aggravate and to disturb public opinion in the United States - but, at no time, severe enough to cause a sharp reversal in United States policy such as the resumption of bombing or the blockading of harbors and other drastic military actions on our part.

Thus, they reason, that if their losses are only a fractional part of their annual manpower input (young men turning 17 or 18 years old) and the disturbances to their economy while severe are acceptable, they, Hanoi, can let the clock run, confident that time is running in their favor.

Thus, we are in the situation where both sides are depending upon time running in their favor. The United States, feeling that with sufficient time, the South Vietnam military will "shape up" and take over. Hanoi, confident that this cannot happen before an angered American public forces a sharp reversal of United States policy.

In any event, there is a grave questions in my mind whether "Vietnamization" will work - even given time for training and equipping South Vietnamese military.

My reasons are these.

The South Vietnamese are no novices in the war business. They have been at it for a long, long time. Years and years and countless billions have been spent in equipping them and training them but it hasn't produced results.

South Vietnam is war-weary. Their villages and hamlets and many of their cities have been ravaged, their countryside bombed incessantly by United States bombers, their country has been fought over now for a decade or more and against this background, it is hard to believe that they are about to "shape up".

Politically, South Vietnam has been a center of disunity. The factions are many. The Buddhists, the Catholics, the Hoa-Haos, the Cao-Dais are all powerful political entities that are only partially and, I believe, temporarily, "cemented together" under the present government. Each of these groups have in the past had their own political organizations, and, indeed, their own

armies. It is difficult to believe that they will fight shoulder to shoulder in the future.

Therefore, one can surmise that internal dissention within South Vietnam and the traditional rivalry of political factions might frustrate President Nixon's plan of Vietnamization of the war.

Therefore, President Nixon must have some options open for additional movements in the direction of peace or a fall-back if his plan fails. There appear to be very few options available to him.

He might reintensify the war by resuming bombing of the North and taking counter-actions against the North but I question whether public opinion will support a policy decision of this kind.

On the other hand, he could deal in some way with a unilateral cease-fire or accelerating withdrawals but in each of these moves, he must seek and secure approval of the present South Vietnamese government and this is difficult.

He could intensify political action through the Soviets who so far have ignored all pleas for help or the French who might be useful because of their traditional connections with Hanoi.

There may be other alternative actions open to him which only intense study of current developments would reveal.

In conclusion, I believe that in the struggle against time, that Hanoi has the best of it because opposition to the war will probably escalate and the flaws in the "Vietnamization" are such that the chances are better than even that it will not come off according to plan. Therefore, I believe the outlook is grim for our side.

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